

SOUTHCENTRAL FOUNDATION NUKA SYSTEM OF CARE

Trauma-Informed Care

The impact of trauma on physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health is significant and far-reaching. Southcentral Foundation (SCF) has many programs and methods in place to support people who have been affected by trauma. These include training for primary care providers (for example, SCF's Core Concepts training) to increase skills to build relationships with customer-owners so they can support them with many needs, including coping with trauma; integration of Behavioral Health Consultants into primary care to work with customer-owners when they need support; and behavioral health services, including individual therapy and the Behavioral Urgent Response Team, which provides crisis intervention for customer-owners who may be at risk of harm to themselves or others.

One of the programs established by SCF to support people affected by trauma is the Family Wellness Warriors (FWW) program, originally created with the goal of ending domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and child neglect in the state of Alaska within a generation. FWW builds on cultural strengths to change patterns of behaviors that disrupt family life and affect the next generation by offering paths for healing from trauma. FWW recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings. FWW's programs emphasize culture and spirituality, and use peer leaders and modeling rather than a more traditional clinical approach.

SCF is an Alaska Native customer-owned system responsible for providing health care and related services to approximately 65,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people in Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and surrounding villages. SCF provides a wide range of services, including but not limited to behavioral health (residential and day treatment programs), pharmacy, dental, OBGYN, optometry, Elder Program, traditional healing, and primary care. SCF offers a full range of behavioral health services, such as crisis intervention, medication management and psychotherapy. SCF additionally provides care to 55 villages in the Anchorage Service Unit by supporting village providers, offering consultation, using telemedicine, and providing regularly scheduled on-site clinical services.

HISTORY

signed a co-ownership and co-management agreement with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to build and run the Alaska Native Medical Center, which is responsible for delivering hospital services to Alaska Native and American Indian people.

One of the first things SCF did upon taking responsibility for the healthcare system was conduct a community needs assessment, asking the community to identify their top 5 priorities for the healthcare system to address. Domestic violence,

child abuse, and child neglect were among the top 5 priorities the community identified. FWW was one of the many approaches SCF implemented to address these concerns.

A RETURN TO OUR TRUE SELVES

SCF's FWW derives its Dena'ina name, Nu'iju, from a word that means "returning to our true selves." The meaning of Nu'iju also describes the perspective of FWW, a program grounded in a conceptual model that recognizes the impact of trauma on all dimensions of health and believes that healing, "a return to our true self," is possible.

FWW's trainings are developed with customer-owners—SCF's term for the Alaska Native and American Indian people they serve—in mind and utilize the strengths and values of the Native community to support participants in healing from trauma.

FWW's wide range of evidence-based, peer-guided offerings, include but are not limited to support for those experiencing grief and loss, domestic violence, cycles of abuse, post-traumatic stress, survivors of suicide, prison and reentry, co-dependency, as well as recovery and parenting. FWW's offerings have shown statistically significant results in the development of protective factors and decrease of trauma symptomology.

PROGRAMS OFFERED BY FWW

FWW offers a number of training intensives intended to create a safe space for personal processing and offer instruction on topics related to trauma, including tools to address the effects of trauma. These trainings include:

Arrigah House Training

This five-day culturally-connected intensive training is designed to host up to 50 people and is focused on historical trauma, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and the ways complex trauma impacts adult and generational behaviors. Arrigah House has been delivered successfully in person and virtually, in both rural and urban environments, and within correctional facilities.

Over the five-day training, participants share their stories and teach topics in a large group from a culturally rooted curriculum. These stories represent journeys of challenge, pain, resilience, and hope. After each large group session, participants meet in learning circles to safely and confidentially talk about how they connect to the story. Through sharing in the safety of a learning circle, the cycle of trauma can be broken.

Advanced Leader and Education Training (ALET)

This five-day workshop trains participants to become learning circle facilitators for various training intensives including Arrigah House and Soldier's Heart Training. Participants practice facilitating learning circles, learn to create a safe environment, share and respond to story, and gain tools to reverse the effects of trauma.

The structure of this training mirrors the group leading experience in a safe environment. Participants practice group leading with the support and supervision of an experienced learning circle leader coach. Each participant receives individual feedback during a coaching session with a focus on their strengths and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Soldier's Heart Training (SHT)

This five-day training intensive is designed by and for combat veterans and first-responders to learn to successfully process the effects of post-traumatic stress in a healthy way. Research has shown that combat veterans and first responders are more likely to die from suicide than in the line of duty and are at-risk for unhealthy substance use. SHT is designed to provide tools and skills to process work-related trauma so it no longer controls day-to-day life. During this training and peer-led group experience, participants benefit from shared experience with the overloaded grief response; survivor guilt's negative impact on the individual through shame, deterioration of self-esteem and self-recriminations; as well as self-defeating unhealthy anger and self-destructive behaviors.

Nu'iju Healing Therapeutic Community (NHTC)

The Nu'iju Healing Therapeutic Community (NHTC) is a 12-month therapeutic living environment, offering a culturally rooted and spiritually connected program within a medium security correctional center. It offers a comprehensive residential program designed to change negative core beliefs of inmates.

The program encourages cultural strengths and traditional values to enhance protective factors, and participants are invited to explore and deepen their spiritual connection. The program addresses denial and minimization, distorted thinking patterns, poor coping skills, interests/attitudes, emotion management, adult relationships, and unstable lifestyles. Foundational skills include peer accountability, confronting unhealthy behaviors and attitudes, and challenging negative beliefs. As much as possible, Nu'iju is separated from the general population of the prison to create a safe and focused environment for participants to learn how to live within the structures of accountability with the freedom to break away from the Criminal Code and be transformed into citizens who are responsible for their actions.

Learning Circles

Learning circles are safe and judgement-free places for diverse participants to meet and safely share personal story, practice new skills, and form healthy relationships. FWW's learning circles are topic-specific and operate in ongoing cycles that last 60 to 90 minutes and require no appointment.

Learning circles focus on building resiliency and protective factors through culturally-rooted, strength-based support and include curriculum topics such as healing from domestic violence, reentry support, grief and loss, veterans and first responders, co-dependency, recovery support, life skills, anger management, healthy parenting, and more. Learning circles are available in virtual as well as in-person formats.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FWW NU'IJU

Data collected by SCF has shown that FWW's programs are effective in providing participants with the tools to deal with trauma. A propensity-matched retrospective cohort study compared post-training health care utilization changes for 90 FWW participants to health care utilization changes for a 90-person comparison group. All cohort members were Alaskans. FWW participants showed a 55% reduction in emergency department visits (visit count ratio 0.45, 95% CI 0.25-0.83) and a 79% reduction in substance use related visits (visit count ratio 0.21, 95% CI 0.07-0.64).

In addition, FWW evaluation data has shown statistically significant results for health outcomes for FWW training participants. Participants show change in the desired direction on all domains measured, with increases in protective

factors and decreases in factors negatively affecting quality of life. Significant reductions in unhealthy substance use, trauma symptomology, depression, and anxiety in FWW participants were observed. This included 63 percent of men and 68 percent of women who attended FWW trainings showing a reduction in depression, and 60 percent of women and 63 percent of men showing a reduction of trauma symptomology.

CONCLUSION

SCF's Family Wellness peer-driven programs use cultural strengths to heal trauma and prevent it from disrupting lives in the next generation. FWW has also worked with many outside organizations to adapt and implement FWW trainings for unique communities both nationally and internationally, and FWW is currently working with another state to implement a therapeutic community in a correctional facility. Trauma-informed care is part of SCF's full continuum of care that supports customer-owners in achieving overall wellness, and as data from FWW shows, programs that work to heal trauma can positively impact wellness in other areas.